County support keeps WCC tuition lowest in state

Tuition for Washtenaw County residents attending Washtenaw Community College will remain the lowest in the state next academic year, as the college freezes rates and reduces online tuition.

As part of its ongoing commitment to affordability, WCC's Board of Trustees voted to hold in-district tuition steady and reduce online tuition to match the $99 per credit rate for on-campus courses.

The college's ability to maintain affordable tuition is made possible in large part through long-standing support from the Washtenaw County community.

"Keeping tuition low is central to our mission of opening doors to the community we serve," said WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca.

"For 60 years, WCC has remained focused on access and opportunity – ensuring college is affordable while maintaining the high-quality programs, support services, information technology and cutting-edge labs aligned with industry needs that help our students succeed."

WCC continues to be among Michigan's most affordable college options, consistently offering the state's lowest published in-district tuition rate and strong value for students seeking high-quality, accessible education.

The Board approved modest tuition increases of 3 percent for out-of-district and out-of-state students, along with adjustments to online rates.

VOTE
AUGUST 4

WCC MILLAGE RENEWAL

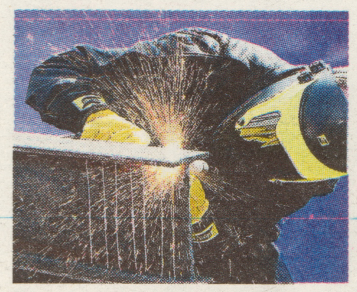
Long-standing support from Washtenaw County residents helps WCC maintain its low tuition rates.

A renewal of an operating millage last approved in 2016 will appear on the August 4 ballot. Learn more about the proposal on **PAGE 3**.

Washtenaw Community College
ON THE RECORD

ontherecord.wccnet.edu /WashtenawCC @WashtenawCC @WashtenawCC JUNE 2026

INSIDE



SKILLED IMPACT

Summer means skilled trades training on the WCC campus, bringing thousands of people and millions of dollars to Washtenaw County. **PAGE 8**

TALENT PIPELINE

University of Michigan Hospitals Chief Operating Officer Luanne Thomas Ewald discusses WCC's value to her organization and the community in the latest 'Keep Up The Good Work.' **PAGE 7**

VETERAN SALUTE

WCC is hosting its fifth annual Washtenaw County Vet Fest on August 1. All veterans and their families are welcome to enjoy a day of free food, fun and resources. **PAGE 2**

2,715 REASONS TO CELEBRATE

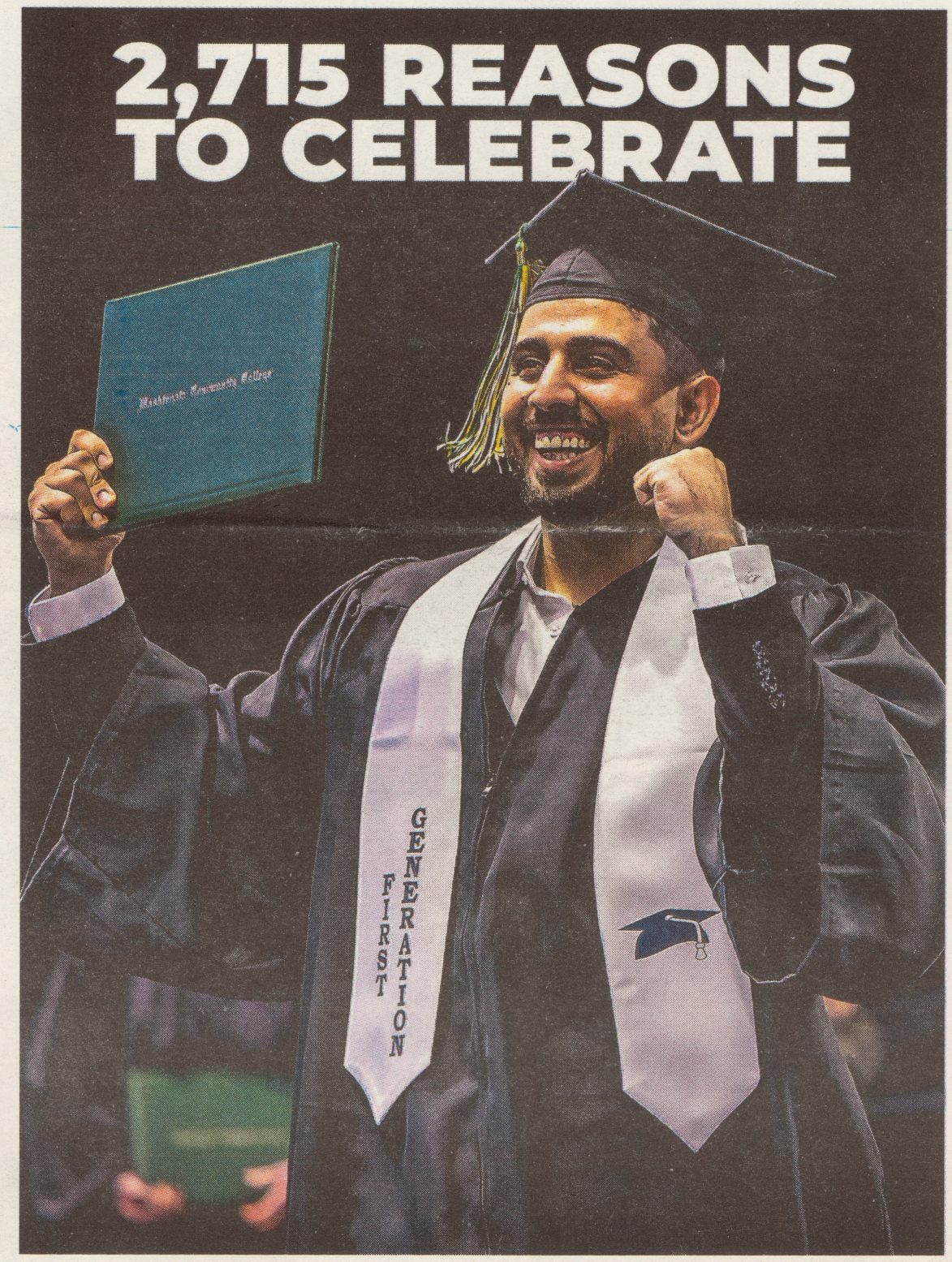


PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

Washtenaw Community College graduate Mohammed Otaifah, who earned a Business Administration Transfer associate degree, celebrates a milestone generations in the making as the first in his family to earn a college degree.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Degrees that strengthen Washtenaw County

By DR. ROSE B. BELLANCA
WCC President

Every commencement ceremony tells hundreds of individual stories.

At Washtenaw Community College's graduation celebration in May, those stories included first-generation college graduates crossing the stage to cheers from proud families, parents completing degrees while raising children and working full-time jobs, and students who arrived seeking a fresh start, a new skill or a more affordable path to a bachelor's degree.

In all, 2,715 individuals graduated from Washtenaw Community College as part of the Class of 2026, collectively completing 1,688 associate degrees and 2,234 certificates.

But commencement is also about something larger than individual achievement.

Graduation day is a reminder of what a community college returns to the community that supports it.

Those graduates represent nurses caring for local patients, skilled trades professionals helping build and maintain our region's infrastructure and cybersecurity experts protecting businesses.

There are now newly minted radiographers, dental assistants, advanced manufacturing

See **PRESIDENT**, page 3

Washtenaw Community College
4800 E. Huron River Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48105-4800

Please recycle

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #792
ROYAL OAK, MI 48068

ECRWSSEDDM
RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER

WCC programs are affordable, flexible and nationally recognized!
ENROLL FOR FALL '26 SEMESTER TODAY!
wccnet.edu/enroll
WCC

Publisher: Rose B. Bellanca, Ed.D.
President, WCC

Executive Editor: Lori Mouton
VP, Public Relations & Marketing

Editor/Designer: Rich Rezler
Communications Director

Writer: Fran LeFort
Media Relations Director

Comments and suggestions are welcomed. Email editor Rich Rezler at rrezler@wccnet.edu or call 734-973-3629.

Washtenaw Community College strives to make a positive difference in people's lives through accessible and excellent educational programs and services.

On the Record is written and designed by the WCC Marketing and Communications Department, Washtenaw Community College, 4800 E. Huron River Dr., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105-4800.

Questions about the WCC programs and services described in this publication should be directed to the Office of Admissions at 734-973-3543.

All rights reserved. No part of the material may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage retrieval system without the permission of the publisher.

Washtenaw Community College is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission, 230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500, Chicago, Illinois 60604-1411; 800-621-7440; hlcommision.org. Call 734-973-3300 for information about Washtenaw Community College.

ADA/EEO/Title IX/Section 504 Compliance Statements

Washtenaw Community College does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, marital status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or any other protected status in its programs and activities. The following office has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Vice President of Student Services, SC 251, 734-973-3536. Facility access inquiries: V.P. of Facilities, Development & Operations, PO 112, 734-677-5322. If you have a disability and require accommodation to participate in an on-campus event, contact Learning Support Services at 734-973-3342 to request accommodations at least 72 hours in advance. © 2023 Washtenaw Community College.

Title II Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act Compliance Statement

The Student-Right-to-Know and The Crime Awareness & Campus Security Act of 1990 (also known as the Clery Act) requires institutions to disclose information about graduation rates, crime statistics, and security information to current and prospective students. Individuals interested in obtaining this type of information should contact the Dean of Students office at 734-973-3328. Copyright 2022 Washtenaw Community College.

WCC Board of Trustees

Christina Fleming, Chair
Angela Davis, Vice Chair
David DeVarti, Treasurer
Ruth A. Hatcher, Secretary
Diana McKnight-Morton
William G. Milliken Jr.
Eileen Peck

Rose B. Bellanca, Ed.D.
WCC President

Washtenaw County Vet Fest '26 coming to WCC campus

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

All local military veterans, active-duty personnel and their families are invited to a day of free food, fun and information at the 2026 Washtenaw County Vet Fest on Saturday, August 1.

Pre-registration is required. Sign up at washtenaw.cc/vetfest26.

The Wadhams Veterans Center at Washtenaw Community College is organizing the fifth annual event in collaboration with multiple veterans organizations throughout Washtenaw County.

The event runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with activities set up near the main entrance to the WCC campus off East Huron River Drive.

"The purpose of Vet Fest is to provide a day of fun and relaxation for local veterans and their families, all while giving them access to the major resource and benefit providers in the area," said WCC Wadhams Veterans Center coordinator Carol Osborne.

"It's sort of a one-stop shop for veterans and gives service providers an opportunity to connect with the community they serve."

Events and activities are planned for all ages, including:

- Free food
- Live music
- Cold treats
- Hourly raffles
- Kids activities
- Carnival games
- Military vehicles
- K-9 demonstrations
- Veteran-owned businesses
- Resource provider exhibits
- Secretary of State office on site

Attendees can earn extra raffle tickets by showing their veteran pride and wearing something that represents a branch of service.

Learn more and register for Vet Fest '26 at washtenaw.cc/vetfest26

FREE COLLEGE DAY: A TIME TO EXPLORE

PHOTOS BY JD SCOTT

Washtenaw Community College's Free College Week finale offered a day of free on-campus classes, activities and exploration for community members of all ages. Teddy bears received health check-ups in the college's nursing labs from Dean of Health Sciences Dr. Shari Lambert (top left) and children could also test out chemistry (top right). Meanwhile, older residents participated in classes and activities ranging from (bottom row, from left) sushi making, esports tournaments and line dancing lessons. Free College Week started with five days of free online classes for county residents.

WCC Foundation honors three community leaders

Linh Song | Dr. Irene Butter | Dr. Lynette Findley

Three community leaders were honored as "Sheroes" at the 29th annual WCC Foundation Women's Council Celebration Luncheon in May.

The event supported the WCC Foundation's Student Impact Fund, which helps students cover unexpected expenses that can jeopardize their ability to remain in school.

Since 1997, the Women's Council has recognized women and women-led organizations whose leadership and service have made a lasting impact across the region.

This year's honorees include:

DR. IRENE BUTTER

Butter is a Holocaust survivor, educator and internationally recognized peace advocate. Deported to Nazi prison camps in 1943, including Bergen-Belsen, she survived until her family's release in 1945.

After remaining silent for nearly 40 years, she devoted her life to Holocaust education and dialogue. A Professor Emerita of Public Health at the University of Michigan, she co-founded the Raoul Wallenberg Medal and Lecture Series and Zeitouna, a Palestinian-Jewish women's dialogue group grounded in "Refusing to be Enemies." She is the author of From Holocaust to Hope: Shores Beyond Shores.

DR. LYNETTE FINDLEY

Dr. Findley is President and CEO of LMF Strategic Initiatives LLC and a respected leader in education and community service. During a 29-year career at Eastern Michigan University, she advanced programs supporting foster youth, displaced workers and other students, while helping secure more than $5 million in grant funding to expand educational access.

Her leadership spans numerous community organizations, including United Way's Power of the Purse, Ann Arbor Summer Festival, Embracing Our Differences, Jewish Family Services and the WCC Women's Council. She is the founder of the Michigan ACE Women of Color Collaborative and chaired the development of the Eastern Washtenaw Recreation Center.

A founding member of Black Women in Michigan Politics and longtime public servant, including eight years as Superior Charter Township Clerk, Dr. Findley is known for advancing equity and delivering meaningful community impact.

LINH SONG

Song has more than 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience focused on child advocacy, housing access and anti-trafficking efforts. She co-founded the Song Foundation, which invests in organizations advancing equity and improving quality of life across Southeast Michigan.

The first American-born member of her refugee family, Song is deeply committed to addressing social, racial and economic inequities.

She holds two degrees from the University of Michigan, serves as Board Chair of the Song Foundation, co-chair of Michigan Reproductive Rights for All and serves on multiple boards.

WCC seeking operating millage renewal on Aug. 4

Washtenaw Community College is requesting a millage renewal on the August 4 primary ballot.

The purpose of the proposal is to renew an operating millage that was previously approved by county voters in 2016.

WCC is seeking to renew the millage for a 10-year period from 2027 through 2036 and restore it to 0.85 mill.

Revenue generated by WCC's millage renewal enables the college to continue educating and training the nurses who care for us, the officers who protect us, the teachers who educate our children, the skilled trades and manufacturing professionals who build and power our region, the cybersecurity specialists who safeguard our digital world and more of the professionals we depend upon most.

The millage renewal provides essential financial support for WCC's programs, services, information technology and cutting-edge training labs aligned with industry standards.

Renewing the millage supports:

- Generating an estimated $524 million in economic impact annually, resulting from training and educating students who live and work in our region.
- Educating and training 25,000 students annually, providing everyone with the opportunity to earn a certificate, degree or new skill to enter the workforce, advance or change their career.
- Providing students with the most affordable option to complete their first two years of college before transferring to a four-year university to complete a bachelor's degree.
- Preparing Washtenaw County's workforce for higher-wage, in-demand careers in industries like healthcare, cybersecurity, information technology, and mobility and advanced manufacturing jobs focused on electric vehicle, battery and semiconductor technician training.
- Supporting our local and regional economy including restaurant, hotel, hospitality and retail commerce industries each summer by hosting training for five national skilled trades unions on campus - generating $23 million of the college's overall annual economic impact.

For 60 years, taxpayer investment in WCC has strengthened our workforce, fueled our economy and expanded opportunities across our community. ●

Learn more about the millage renewal at wccnet.edu/millage.

Answering frequently-asked-questions about the ballot proposal

Q. WHEN IS THE ELECTION?

A. Tuesday, August 4, 2026. The polls will be open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Q. WHAT IS ON THE BALLOT?

A. Voters residing within the boundaries of Washtenaw County will vote on a 0.85 operating millage renewal.

Q. WHY IS THIS MILLAGE PROPOSAL NECESSARY?

A. The primary purpose of the millage proposal is to seek voter approval of a 0.85 operating millage originally approved by voters in 2016. Revenue from this millage provides essential financial support to WCC's programs, services, information technology and cutting-edge training labs and equipment aligned with industry standards.

MORE ONLINE

If you have questions or need more information about the millage renewal proposal, visit wccnet.edu/millage or call 734-677-5000.

Q. WHAT WILL THE BALLOT PROPOSAL COST?

A. If voters approve the 0.85 mill ballot proposal, the WCC tax rate will be the same as it was in 2016. Returning to this tax rate will require a renewal of 0.8109 mills and a restoration of 0.0391 mills. The renewal is about $85 a year or 23 cents a day for a $100,000 home in Washtenaw County.

Q. WHAT DOES THE MILLAGE RENEWAL FUND?

A. The millage renewal supports WCC programs, student services, information technology, advanced equipment and training labs aligned with industry standards, and the 25,000 students who enroll at WCC annually who pursue degrees, certificates, transfer opportunities and career training.

Q. WHO CAN VOTE ON THIS BALLOT PROPOSAL?

A. Anyone who resides in Washtenaw County, will be 18 years of age or older on Election Day and is registered to vote can vote.

Voters in Michigan can now register to vote up through and on Election Day (August 4).

Q. WHERE CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You can register to vote at any Secretary of State office or at the Clerk's Office where you reside. You can download a voter registration application at michigan.gov/vote. You can also use WCC's TurboVote system (wcc.turbovote.com) to register, request an absentee ballot and receive election reminders.

Q. DO I NEED TO UPDATE MY VOTER REGISTRATION?

A. You need to update your voter registration if you have changed your name or address since the last time you voted. You can do this at any Secretary of State Office or at the Clerk's Office where you reside. More information is available at michigan.gov/vote.

Q. WHERE DO I VOTE?

A. You will vote at your regular precinct in the community where you reside. If you are unsure of your precinct, visit michigan.gov/vote.

Q. CAN I VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT?

A. Yes, all eligible and registered voters in Michigan may request an absent voter ballot. You can download a Michigan Absent Voter Ballot Application by visiting michigan.gov/vote.

After June 26, voters can complete their absentee ballot application and vote in one stop at their Clerk's Office. The process takes less than five minutes.

Completed absentee ballots must be received by your city or township clerk by 8 p.m. on Election Day. ●

PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca addresses the WCC Class of 2026.

PRESIDENT

continued from cover

technicians, entrepreneurs, software developers, first responders and educators strengthening the local economy and improving quality of life throughout Washtenaw County.

That is the role community colleges play.

As WCC celebrates its 60th anniversary, this year's graduates join nearly 60,000 alumni who have earned more than 89,000 degrees and certificates over the college's six decades.

WCC exists to create opportunity for students and to meet the needs of the community. The two are inseparable.

When local employers need highly trained workers, WCC responds. When residents need affordable access to higher education, WCC provides it. When industries evolve, the college adapts programs to prepare students for the jobs and careers our region depends on.

That mission matters now more than ever.

For many students, WCC represents an affordable pathway at a time when the cost of higher education remains a national concern.

Others come to WCC seeking short-term credentials or workforce training that can quickly lead to stable, in-demand careers.

The community benefits from every one of those success stories.

A strong community college contributes to economic development, workforce readiness and social mobility. It helps local businesses grow. It helps families build financial stability. It helps communities attract employers who depend on a skilled workforce.

Every graduate I greeted on the commencement stage represents more than a personal milestone. They represent talent staying in our region, essential workers entering the workforce, future business owners launching ventures and community members prepared to contribute in meaningful ways.

Commencement celebrates achievement. It also offers a glimpse of the future our community is building together.

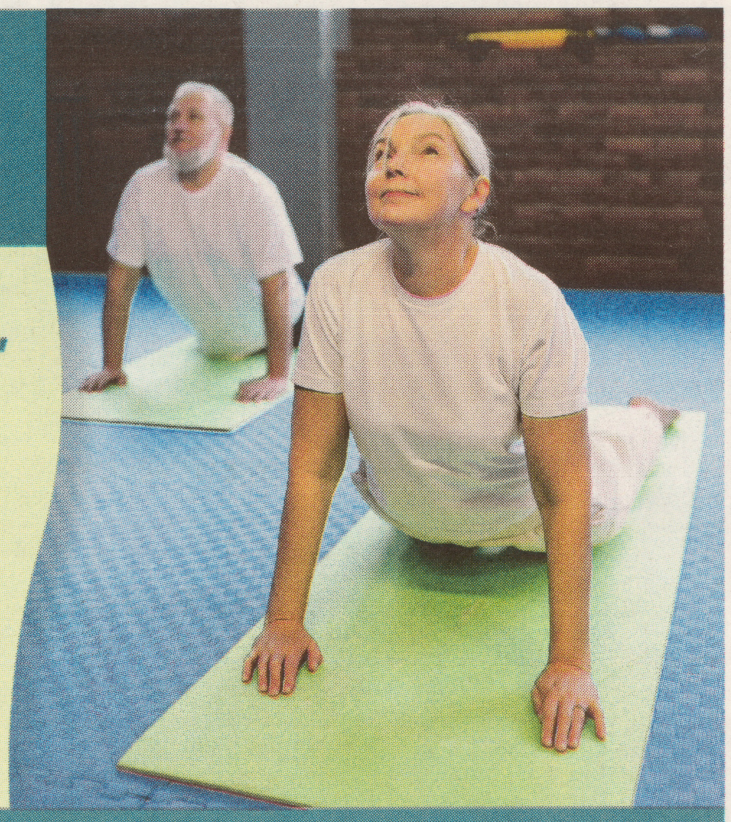
And for 60 years, that future has started at WCC. ●

Senior Focus
for WASHTENAW COUNTY

Topics include fitness, yoga, dance, visual arts, history and more.

Washtenaw County residents age 65 years or older (before the start of the semester) can take classes at many convenient locations throughout the county. Classes are requested by and designed especially for older adults.

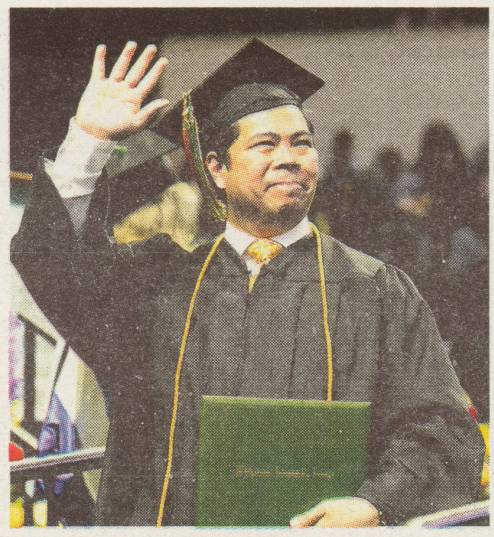
For class details and registration, contact the individual centers. The phone numbers and street addresses are available at the website noted below.



For general information, visit wccnet.edu/senior-focus or call 734-677-5060.

Washtenaw Community College

VICTOR REYNOLDS
Registered Nursing



When students enroll in the Nursing program at WCC, they're stepping into a pipeline that keeps local hospitals and care facilities staffed with highly trained professionals.

Victor Reynolds is one of those graduates who is now moving directly from classroom to bedside.

Reynolds accepted a position in the rehabilitation unit at Trinity Health Ann Arbor, where he will care for patients recovering from surgery, illness and injury. He'll begin as a graduate nurse while preparing to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) exam.

"I heard about the strong reputation of the WCC nursing program – particularly how well its graduates do on the NCLEX – and wanted to be part of it," said Reynolds, who moved from Walled Lake to Ann Arbor to enroll in a program named a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education by the National League for Nursing.

Reynolds was one of 129 WCC Class of 2026 graduates to earn a Registered Nursing associate degree. He did so with honors (3.5-3.8 GPA) and was a member of the college's Phi Theta Kappa honor society.

Seven more graduates completed the LPN-to-RN associate degree program while 102 students began their nursing journey by completing the Nursing Assistant Skills program. It was the most popular certificate among Class of 2026 graduates.

Reynolds is not new to healthcare.

He worked in administrative roles for a home healthcare agency from 2009-2015 before starting his own company that focuses on quality assurance for agencies.

Over time, though, he began to feel drawn toward direct patient care, where he believed his work could have a stronger impact and greater sense of purpose.

His first nursing school clinical experience brought him to the rehab unit at Trinity Health – an early preview of where he would begin his nursing career.

An eventual return to home care work as a visiting nurse is among future possibilities.

Reynolds said WCC's combination of top-notch facilities, equipment and faculty support helped prepare him for the demands of the profession.

"The faculty was the best part of the experience," he said. "They nurtured every student and really want you to succeed." ●

PREEONNAH WALLACE
Secondary Education

One by one, Preeonnah Wallace carefully pressed letters onto the top of her graduation cap during Washtenaw Community College's commencement rehearsal.

"MADE TO TEACH," it read by the time she finished.

The message fits the 22-year-old Ypsilanti native, who says working with young people has long felt like the path for her.

Wallace earned a Secondary Education-Transfer associate degree from WCC and will continue her studies at University of Michigan-Dearborn, where she plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education.

Her current employment is also influencing the direction she may take as an educator. Wallace works at a clinic that helps individuals with autism spectrum disorder build functional life skills, improve communication and reduce harmful or disruptive behaviors.

"Seeing how impactful those treatments can be for people has me thinking that maybe I'll focus on special education for secondary," she said.

As Michigan schools continue to face teacher shortages, Wallace represents the kind of future educator WCC is working to develop through transfer pathways and partnerships tied directly to community needs.

WCC is the premier community college partner for MI Talent Together, one of the nation's largest "Grow Your Own" teacher preparation programs.

The program, founded in partnership with the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative, includes a consortium of all 56 intermediate school districts in Michigan.

For Wallace, that step is already in motion – continuing her education and preparing for a career helping students succeed in the classroom. ●

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT

Honorary Associate Degree in Community Service recipient Bhushan Kulkarni addresses the WCC Clas

Tech entrepreneur encou grads to open doors for o

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

Bhushan Kulkarni challenged Washtenaw Community College graduates to measure success not only by what they achieve, but by how many others they help.

Delivering the keynote address during the college's Commencement ceremony, the tech entrepreneur and recipient of WCC's Honorary Associate Degree in Community Service urged graduates to pay it forward.

Kulkarni

"At some time, someone helps you. A teacher, a mentor, a parent, a friend or maybe a total stranger that believed in you," Kulkarni said. "Be that person to someone else. Take time in your busy lives to lift others up. Success is meaningful, but significant success comes from helping others succeed."

The message reflected Kulkarni's own journey. He and his wife, Swatee, came to the United States from India more than 35 years ago to pursue graduate studies in engineering.

"When I first came to this country, I had a name people struggled to pronounce. They still do. An accent people struggle to understand. And exactly $150 in my pocket," Kulkarni said. "I didn't know anyone. I didn't have a road map. But I had a scholarship for education, determination and a willingness to step outside my comfort zone again and again.

"Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes I failed. Actually, many times I failed. But every single time I learned. And learning compounds just like interest, except this is the kind of interest that you don't pay any taxes on."

More than three decades later, Kulkarni returned to the Commencement stage not opportunity, but as someone embrace it.

Before Kulkarni took the po Trustees chair Christina Flem highly accomplished entrepre than three decades building a companies across the technol

Kulkarni is the Arbor-based GDI Corporation, as SensCy.

His companies nationally for the he has earned re Young Entrepren

However, it wa mitment to comm special recogniti

For decades, h leadership and p zations like Saline Area Schoo Chamber of Commerce, the A munity Foundation, Ann Arbo support economic developme tunity for others.

He serves as board co-chair Fund, a group of entrepreneu to grow high-impact startups ership across Michigan's start

At WCC, Kulkarni has been advocate for the college and it WCC Foundation Board of Dir board chair from 2023 to 202

His family established an en

EDWIN BARNETT
Accounting

For Edwin Barnett, time at WCC became about more than earning a degree – it became an opportunity to build confidence, develop professional skills and launch a business.

"My time at WCC has been transformative. I came in unsure of exactly what direction I wanted to take, and over the past few years I've grown academically, professionally, and personally," Barnett says. "I learned discipline through balancing classes, work, and entrepreneurship at the same time. WCC helped me build confidence in myself and gave me opportunities I genuinely don't think I would have had elsewhere."

The 23-year-old Ann Arbor native and Huron High School graduate earned an associate degree in Accounting. Alongside his coursework, he worked in restaurants and dabbled in entrepreneurship, building Win-Win Printing, a custom UV printing business that specializes in promotional products.

Using his business as his testing ground, Barnett was one of three finalists in the WCC Entrepreneurship Center's annual Pitch@WCC contest, a hands-on learning experience where students develop and present business ideas. After training and coaching, the select group of finalists present their pitches live to a panel of judges.

"Pitch@WCC was an incredible experience because it pushed me outside of my comfort zone," he said. "It taught me how important storytelling, communication, and confidence are when presenting a business. Being surrounded by other motivated students and receiving feedback from mentors and judges was extremely valuable."

Barnett plans to pursue a bachelor's degree from Eastern Michigan University, following a 3+1 articulation agreement with the neighboring university that allows him to complete three years' worth of college credits at WCC's low tuition rate. ●

20
class
GRADU
PROFI
Stories
Rich R
Photos
JD Sc

PHOTOS BY JD SCOTT

s of 2026 during its Commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 16.

urages thers

as someone searching for
encouraging graduates to

odium, WCC Board of
ing introduced him as "a
eneur who has spent more
nd leading innovative
ogy sector."
e founder and CEO of Ann
Infotech and InfoReady
well as a co-founder of

s have been recognized
eir growth and impact and
cognition as an Ernst &
neur of the Year.
as Kulkarni's deep com-
munity that earned him
ion from WCC.
e has dedicated his time,
philanthropy to organi-
ls, the Ann Arbor Area
nn Arbor Area Com-
or SPARK and others to
nt, education and oppor-

of the Michigan Founders
rs and investors working
and strengthen civic lead-
up community.
a passionate and generous
s students. He joined the
ectors in 2018 and was the
5.
ndowed scholarship that

PAST RECIPIENTS

Bhushan Kulkarni is the 13th recipient of an Honorary Associate Degree in Community Service from WCC. Previous honorees:

2012: John Dingell, U.S. Representative

2013: Michael A. Finney, CEO of Michigan Economic Development Corp.

2014: Gary M. Owen, State Representative

2015: Mary "Molly" Dobson, Philanthropist

2016: Debbie Dingell, U.S. Representative

2017: Adam Zemke, State Representative

2018: George Waddles Jr., Pastor at Second Baptist Church in Ypsilanti

2019: Karl Covert, Ph.D., Dean/Superintendent of Washtenaw Technical Middle College

2020-2021: No traditional commencement

2022: Paul Krutko, President & CEO of Ann Arbor SPARK

2023: Richard J. Landau, J.D., Ph.D., longtime WCC Board of Trustee

2024: Sean Duval, Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

2025: Tom Butman, General Manager of Butman Ford in Ypsilanti

will support students in perpetuity, and he has invested in the next wave of innovators through work with the WCC Entrepreneurship Center.

In return, Kulkarni praised WCC for creating opportunity and supporting students as they pursue their goals.

"Everyone needs a launch pad. And you've got a great one here at WCC. What makes this place special isn't just the classrooms or the degrees. It's the people, the faculty, the staff, administration, the trustees that volunteer their time every day. They are relentless in opening doors, solving problems and believing in you, sometimes even before you believe in yourselves."

MEGAN WATTS
Mechatronics

In some ways, enrolling in the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) program at WCC meant a return to childhood for Megan Watts, who describes her younger self as the girl who would climb trees and play with bugs in her Easter dress.

"I had never really considered (advanced manufacturing) as a career, but when I was a kid I always loved to take things apart and figure out how they worked and how to put them back together," Watts says. "And my younger brother broke a lot of things, so I naturally figured out how to fix them."

Now, the 33-year-old Pittsfield Township resident is graduating from WCC with honors, gained hands-on industry experience and earned the distinction of becoming the first woman to complete WCC's FAME apprenticeship program.

Watts, who grew up in Ypsilanti and graduated from Milan High School in 2011, earned an associate degree in Mechatronics along with Automation Specialist and Robotics Technician certificates.

During the earn-while-you-learn program, she worked at Moeller Aerospace, maintaining CNC machines. She'll continue working for the turbine engine component supplier post-graduation.

Before returning to school, Watts worked for 12 years at the Ypsilanti District Library. She described the FAME program as "challenging, but rewarding" and credits WCC instructors with helping to build her confidence along the way.

"I definitely hunkered down and wanted to succeed," Watts said. "It was made easier because the instructors were so nice. Whenever I asked questions, they made sure to explain it. Over time, it was easier to pick up because we'd just take what we learned, add on to that, and it kept snowballing."

Today, Watts says she's found purpose in her new career path and the teamwork involved in manufacturing.

"I liked helping people at the library, but now I can help people in a different sense," she says. "There's a whole community, especially at Moeller, so many people that operate the machines - a whole team I work with - it's nice to be able to work with them and know I'm making a difference."

JOHAN VILLALOBOS CALDERON
Cybersecurity

For Johan Villalobos Calderon, studying cybersecurity offered a chance to be part of protecting the digital systems people rely on every day.

"I chose cybersecurity because ever since I was a kid, I was always very into computers and curious about what computers can do," said Villalobos Calderon. "When I got to college, I had to decide which field to pursue. I've never really been into programming, but security – knowing how computers communicate – all that really intrigued me."

Villalobos Calderon, 22, earned an associate degree in Cybersecurity from WCC while maintaining a GPA above 3.8, placing him among the college's high honors graduates. He plans to pursue a bachelor's degree at Eastern Michigan University.

In addition to his academic success, Villalobos Calderon was part of the WCC STEM Scholars program, which he said played an important role in his college experience.

"I really felt very supported at WCC throughout my whole program," said Villalobos Calderon, who resides in Ann Arbor with his sister, a University of Michigan student.

As employers increasingly seek professionals who can protect critical systems and digital infrastructure, programs like cybersecurity play an important role in helping communities build a skilled workforce in essential fields.

WCC was designated as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security.

Villalobos Calderon said the program gave him both technical knowledge and practical experience. He appreciated that WCC partners with the Cisco Networking Academy, the world leader in networking technology, to offer cybersecurity-related classes at WCC for a fraction of the cost of other providers.

"I feel like I was definitely taught by professionals in the field who know how it is," Villalobos Calderon said. "The experience was definitely what I was expecting, and probably even better. The coursework was beginner-friendly early on and moved at a pace that I could keep up with."

26
UATE
LES
s by
ezler
s by
cott

OUMOU KANE
Pre-Engineering Transfer

When Oumou Kane enrolls at the University of Michigan to study mechanical engineering this fall, she'll bring with her a strong academic foundation and a boost of confidence provided by her time at WCC.

The 2023 Ann Arbor Huron High School graduate says WCC's smaller class sizes, personalized support and meaningful opportunities to grow as a leader and student made it the ideal place to start her academic pursuits.

And she's not shy about sharing those opinions while participating in one of her many on-campus activities - showing off the college to prospective students and their families while working as one of the college's Student Ambassadors.

"When I give tours, I always emphasize that WCC is a really smart and strategic starting point, especially when it comes to affordability and accessibility. ... I tell families that you're not missing out – you're actually gaining a strong foundation in smaller classes where professors are more available and supportive," Kane said.

"That support system makes a big difference, especially in STEM. I also highlight how strong the transfer pathways are, especially for students aiming for schools like the University of Michigan."

Kane earned a Pre-Engineering Science Transfer associate degree at WCC and stacked up a series of experiences atop her classwork.

She was a member of WCC's STEM Scholars program and the college's Phi Theta Kappa honor society and took advantage of programs such as NextGEN MI-LSAMP, where she explored research pathways, mentorship opportunities and attended a STEM conference in San Diego.

She was also engaged with The Entrepreneurship Center at WCC, including a Solve-IT competition that pushed her to think creatively, solve real-world problems and work in a team setting – gaining soft skills that will be invaluable beyond the classroom.

PHOTOS BY JD SCOTT AND KARI KLAVON

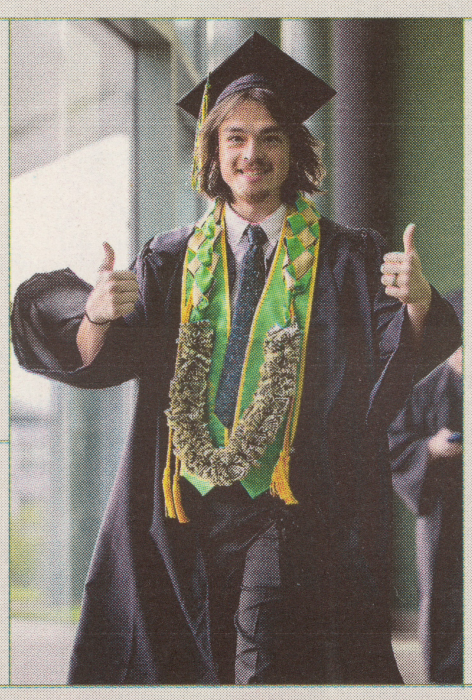
Washtenaw Community College CLASS OF 2026 BY THE NUMBERS

2,715
Total graduates earning an associate degree and/or certificate

1,688
Associate degrees earned

2,234
Certificates earned

28.1
Average age of graduates



Honors

Among the Class of 2026 students who earned associate degrees or certificates:

713
Graduated with High Honors *(3.8 or higher GPA)*

648
Graduated with Honors *(3.5 to 3.79 GPA)*

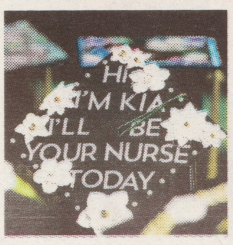
Most Popular Programs

ASSOCIATE DEGREES

General Studies	273
Registered Nursing	129
Liberal Arts-Transfer	127
Business Administration Transfer	120
General Studies-Math & Natural Sciences	83

CERTIFICATES

Nursing Assistant Skills	102
Police Academy	79
Health Care Foundations	75
Core Business Skills	67
Welding & Fabrication Principles	56



MORE ONLINE

Find more Commencement stories at wccnet.edu/news, photo galleries at flickr.com/washtenawcc and a replay of the ceremony at washtenaw.cc/26livestream.

PHOTO BY KARI KLAVON

Melissa Bruzzano, who graduated with an associate degree in Environmental Science, was selected as Commencement student speaker.

Law school grad pivots career at WCC

Melissa Bruzzano proves it's never too late to pursue a new direction

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

After earning a law degree in the early 1990s, Melissa Bruzzano never expected to find herself back in a college classroom.

But the 57-year-old Ann Arbor resident returned to Washtenaw Community College to pursue a new passion – and did so with extraordinary success.

"The first time I graduated, I thought I was done," she said. "As it turns out, that was only the beginning."

Bruzzano, who earned an Environmental Science associate degree from WCC with a 4.0 GPA, was selected as student speaker for the college's 2026 Commencement ceremony.

After building careers in law and education, Bruzzano was inspired to find a new direction after scuba diving trips with her family to Bonaire, a Caribbean island known for its coral reefs and marine ecosystems. Over several years of visits, she witnessed dramatic environmental decline in the reefs firsthand.

Wanting to better understand the changes – and how to help – Bruzzano turned to her local community college.

She chose WCC because it was affordable, close to home and flexible for an adult learner balancing family and work.

"I thought I was getting convenience, but what I got was so much more," Bruzzano told fellow graduates.

Bruzzano quickly distinguished herself academically and developed technical skills in a Principles of Geographic Information Systems course that she said "gave me the pivotal skills I would use as a participant in the NASA DEVELOP program last summer."

Through that program, Bruzzano gained experience in satellite data analysis, work she continues today.

She also credited WCC's Center for Career Success with helping refine her resume and interview skills as a returning adult student, support she said helped her secure the NASA opportunity.

During her commencement speech, Bruzzano encouraged classmates to embrace lifelong learning.

"I thought education was something you completed and then moved on from," she said. "But as I stand here today as a proud graduate of Washtenaw Community College, I know education does not end with this diploma. Rather it can be, and should be, a life-long endeavor."

Her closing message reflected the journey that brought her back to college.

"Graduation is not the finish line. It's the starting point for whatever comes next. It's never too late to learn, to change directions or to find a new purpose," she said.

"Continue to learn as much as possible for the rest of your time on this amazingly beautiful planet."

PHOTOS BY JD SCOTT AND RICH REZLER

CELEBRATING THE GRADUATION SEASON

Commencement is the highlight of the academic year at Washtenaw Community College, but the entire month of May features a variety of graduation-related activities.

At top, the second cohort of WCC's Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) apprenticeship program celebrated its graduation on May 7. Through this earn-while-you-learn apprenticeship model, students gain real-world industry experience while earning a Mechatronics associate degree.

Bottom left, the 67-member graduating cohort of the WCC Nursing program participated in a pinning ceremony on May 4. Graduates were taking a giant step closer to joining the nursing profession by participating in the time-honored tradition.

Bottom middle, the WCC Public Service Training department honored its Corrections Academy graduates on May 1. Six members of the class are employees of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office.

Bottom right, the WCC Police Academy's latest graduating class included six who will serve law enforcement agencies around Washtenaw County, including the Chelsea Police Department, Northfield Township Police Department, Pittsfield Township Police Department, University of Michigan Police Department, Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office and the Ypsilanti Police Department.

'Me & You' free exhibit opens June 12

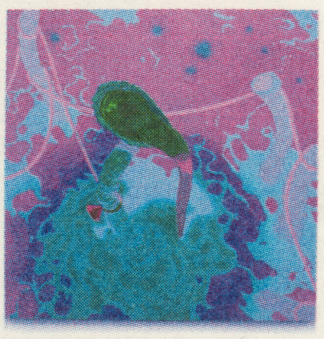
Brach Tiller explores love, domesticity and shared dreams in his new art exhibit at The Gallery at Washtenaw Community College.

"Me & You: Paintings by Brach Tiller" runs June 12 through September 11 and is free and open to the public.

An opening reception will be held from 5-7 p.m. on Friday, June 12, and will feature an artist talk by Tiller at 6 p.m.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to play indoor golf-themed games provided by Ypsilanti-based Putt-R-Round, a playful connection to a series in the exhibit centered on golf balls.

Tiller, a Detroit-based artist, calls the collection "a love letter" to his fiancée and the life they hope to build together. His work often examines intimacy, memory and everyday rituals through vibrant, layered imagery. See his work at brachtiller.com.



"Dinner," by Brach Tiller.

The Gallery at Washtenaw Community College is located inside the Morris Lawrence Building.

Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday. The space is also open during any staffed event in the Morris Lawrence Building and by request outside of posted hours.

Learn more about this and upcoming exhibits at wccnet.edu/gallery.

Video students win statewide production awards

Two Washtenaw Community College students earned first-place honors from the Michigan chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, as the college continued its standout run in the annual Student Production Awards.

Digital Video Production student Jake Wilkins became a back-to-back winner, taking top honors in the Non-Fiction Long-Form category for his 22-minute documentary, "Sincerely, Sage Jo."

Faith Pearson also captured a first-place award in the Animation/Graphics/Special Effects category for her mixed media project, "Mixed Emotions."

The 2026 awards were announced during a ceremony at Michigan State University. The competition is open to all two-year and four-year college programs in the state.

WCC students have now won 55 first-place awards since first entering the competition in 2012.

This is an excerpt of a longer story available at wccnet.edu/news. That story includes links to the winning projects.

KEEP UP THE Good Work

Local leaders discuss their relationship with Washtenaw Community College.

By LUANNE THOMAS EWALD
Chief Operating Officer,
University of Michigan Hospitals

At University of Michigan Health, we know preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals requires strong partnerships with organizations that understand the evolving needs of both students and employers. That's why our long-standing relationship with Washtenaw Community College is so valuable to our organization and our community.

Healthcare is constantly changing, and WCC has consistently demonstrated an ability to respond quickly to workforce needs by developing relevant, high-quality programs that prepare students for in-demand careers.

Over the past decade, Michigan Medicine and other local healthcare organizations have provided input and guidance that helped shape WCC's Surgical Technology associate degree program and certificate programs such as Medical Assisting, Cardiac Telemetry Technician and Sterile Processing. These programs are helping build a strong pipeline of talented professionals who are prepared to make an immediate impact in patient care settings.

We've also been proud to partner with WCC on innovative workforce development initiatives like Michigan Medicine's Service Desk Apprenticeship Program. Since launching in 2018, the program has provided entry-level candidates with paid, hands-on experience in frontline technology support while they complete technical coursework through WCC. Apprentices earn a U.S. Department of Labor journeyman's card along with a 16-credit Computer Systems Technology certificate from WCC, creating meaningful career opportunities while strengthening the future healthcare workforce.

Beyond academics and workforce training, WCC continues to serve as an important community gathering place. Michigan Medicine frequently utilizes the college's Conference Services facilities for trainings, meetings and professional development opportunities. The campus is welcoming, accessible and designed to support collaboration among organizations working to improve our region.

Washtenaw Community College plays a vital role in strengthening our local workforce and expanding educational opportunity for people across our community. We are grateful for our partnership and appreciate WCC's continued commitment to innovation, collaboration and student success. Keep up the good work.

Skilled trades training will bring thousands of people, millions of dollars to Washtenaw County this summer

Annual events have $23 million impact on the local economy

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

More than 6,000 members of five national and international trade unions will travel to Washtenaw County this summer to advance their skills and knowledge through instructor training programs hosted at Washtenaw Community College.

Plumbers and pipefitters, ironworkers, roofers, plasterers and cement masons, and electrical workers will participate in intensive "train the trainer" programs on campus.

The partnerships bring union members from throughout the United States and countries such as Canada, Ireland, Australia and beyond.

Through the multi-year programs, instructors enhance their technical skills, safety practices and industry knowledge before returning home to train fellow trades workers in their local organizations.

Destination Ann Arbor estimates the annual summer training programs have a $23 million economic impact for hotels, restaurants and businesses throughout Washtenaw County.

This summer's training begins June 8-12 with approximately 120 members of the Operational Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association (OPCMIA) on campus.

The United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers will bring about 200 members to WCC on June 22-26.

They'll be followed by approximately 800 members of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers on July 12-18.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers/National Electrical Contractors Association training program will host about 1,300 attendees on campus on July 22-31.

The largest of the summer programs, the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, will conclude the season August 5-10 with approximately 3,200 attendees on campus.

The UA instructor training program has a long history at WCC – growing from approximately 1,200 union instructors in its first year on the WCC campus in 1990. The UA established a permanent footprint on campus when the Great Lakes Regional Training Center opened in 2003.

"There is high demand for skilled trades workers who build vibrant and safe communities for us all," said WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca.

"We're proud to partner with these respected organizations to strengthen training and safety practices and support the future workforce needs of industry."

Union trainers typically spend a week on campus participating in hands-on instruction designed to keep them current on evolving technology, equipment and industry standards.

Some also return throughout the year for specialized coursework and advanced certifications.

Many attendees bring family members, visit local attractions and patronize area businesses during their stay, providing an economic boost throughout the community.

PHOTOS BY JD SCOTT

Chris Parks (left), the Training Director at the Ann Arbor Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Center and Dr. Brandon Tucker (right), Executive Vice President for Instruction at WCC, look on as WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca signs an articulation agreement between the organizations.

WCC, IBEW strengthen workforce partnership with new degree pathways for electrical workers

Washtenaw Community College and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers announced a new articulation agreement designed to help electrical workers earn college degrees while addressing the nation's growing need for skilled trades professionals.

Through a combination of newly developed online coursework and credit awarded for prior learning gained through apprenticeship training and professional experience, IBEW members may earn associate degrees in construction supervision and journeyman industrial.

The new pathways were announced on May 21 by IBEW Local 252, the Michigan Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), the Ann Arbor Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Center (AAEJATC) and college leadership.

The AAEJATC, located in Chelsea, provides education and hands-on training for individuals pursuing careers in the electrical industry throughout Washtenaw, Jackson, Livingston and Ingham counties.

This is an excerpt of a longer story available at wccnet.edu/news.

Thing of the past has electric future

By FRAN LeFORT
Director of Media Relations

What are you doing this summer?

At Washtenaw Community College, the Transportation Technologies programs are bringing a 1974 Volkswagen Thing into the electric age by converting the vintage vehicle into a fully electric car as part of a hands-on learning project.

The transformation began during the Winter 2026 semester, when Auto Body Repair students disassembled the vehicle and repaired its structural components in preparation for the electric conversion.

The project continues this summer with an intensive seven-week course.

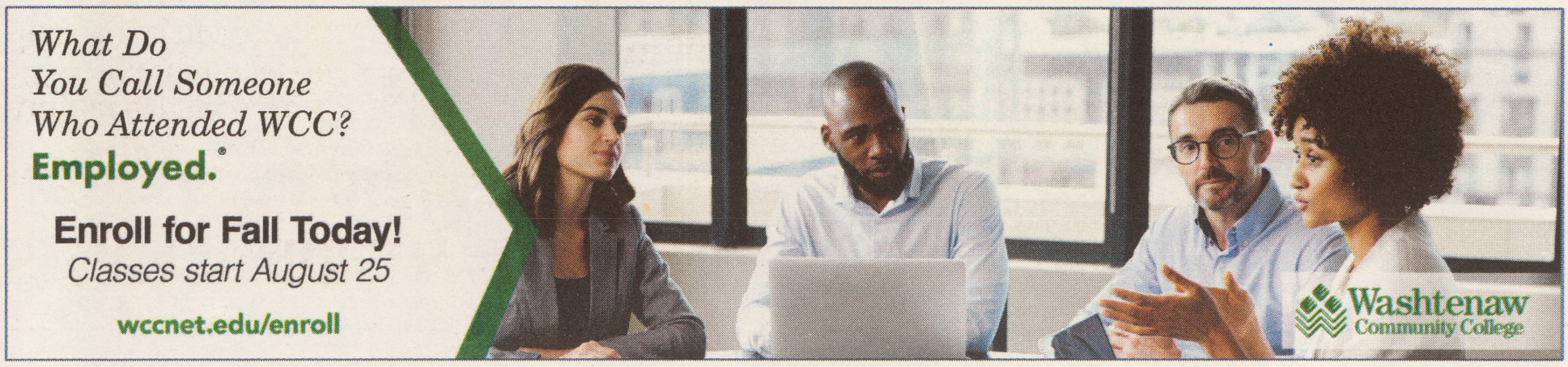
During the summer session, students will install modern electric vehicle technology in WCC's new EV and Battery Lab, replacing the vehicle's original internal combustion engine with a fully electric system.

In the fall, students will complete body restoration and finishing work, with the goal of unveiling the reimagined VW Thing at the 2027 Detroit Auto Show and Autorama.

The project serves as a collaborative, hands-on learning experience across multiple WCC Transportation Technologies programs, including Auto Services, Auto Body and Electric Vehicle training.

Once completed, the vehicle will feature a mahi green and candy white paint scheme inspired by the college's electric Volkswagen ID. Buzz, previously showcased at the 2026 Detroit Auto Show.

WCC has evolved its transportation technologies and mobility education programs alongside the industry for more than a decade, beginning with the launch of its Advanced Transportation Center in 2014.

PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

WCC Transportation Technologies faculty members (from left) Andrew Hueter, Tim VanShoick and Wayne Kessey review student work on a project to convert a Volkswagen Thing to an electric vehicle.